

THE

HISTORIAN



OF HANCOCK COUNTY

www.hancockcountyhistoricalsociety.com

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

January 2025

COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, January 16, 2025, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. The guest speaker is Miki Pfeffer. She will speak on Eliza Jane Poitevant Nicholson, who owned the Times Picayune newspaper from 1876 until 1896. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 228-467-4090. **Please call by noon on Wednesday, January 15**, to make your reservation. Seating is limited to forty-eight (48) people, and we need to order the correct number of lunches. **Served at noon, lunch is \$15.00 for members and \$17.00 for nonmembers**, payable at the door. The catering order is submitted on Wednesday at noon prior to the luncheon on Thursday. If you need to cancel your reservation, please call by noon on Wednesday prior to the luncheon if at all possible so that the society does not incur unnecessary expenses. It is catered by Almost Home Catering with Chef Michelle Nichols. The lunch menu is blackened chicken, Alfredo pasta, vegetables, salad, garlic breadsticks, and black forest cupcakes.



This picture depicts a sugar plantation on the island of antebellum Santo Domingo. Note the harvest of the sugar cane, and the sugar mill

THE MESTAYER

FAMILY

by

James Keating, M.D.

In the second half of the Eighteenth century there were three important revolutions in world history: the American Revolution (1776-1783), the French Revolution (1789-1799), and the Haitian Revolution (1792-1804). The Haitian Revolution has not received the attention of modern historians it deserves, yet it was a turning point in the story of the Atlantic Ocean world in that era

with significant consequences for the United States, French colonial ambitions in the New World, the Spanish footprint in North and Central America, and the Mestayer Family. This article describes the evolution of this important Creole Mestayer Family over nine generations that emigrated from France to the Western Hemisphere. They were important players in this story or history of the last four hundred years in America.

Mestayer (pronounced me'-te'-ye') is a common name in France, and in the Old French language the word means "sharecropper." The Mestayer Family in Hancock County and Louisiana can trace their lineage back to a Ship Captain from La Rochelle who married a minor in Bordeaux. Bordeaux was the port in

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Eddie Coleman, Editor &
Lobrano House Director
James Keating, Publisher

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**LOBRANO HOUSE
HOURS**

MONDAY — FRIDAY
10:00AM — 3:00PM

CLOSED 12—1 (lunch)

MISSION STATEMENT

“TO PRESERVE THE GENERAL AND ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF HANCOCK COUNTY AND TO PRESERVE THE KATE LOBRANO HOUSE AND COLLECTIONS THEREIN; TO RESEARCH AND INTERPRET LIFE IN HANCOCK COUNTY; AND TO ENCOURAGE AN APPRECIATION OF AND INTEREST IN HISTORICAL PRESERVATION.”

France that did all the business with the colony in the Caribbean Sea named Santo Domingo in the Eighteenth Century.

Guillaume Mestayer (1718-1781) immigrated to Santo Domin-

go as a young man to make his fortune. He was a middle class, bourgeois, Catholic planter from Bordeaux, France. In 1753, Guillaume married Marie Jeanne Masse (1726-1792), the daughter of a wealthy

President's Corner**2024 Year in Review**

Part of the mission of our society is to raise public awareness regarding our contributions to the preservation of the history of Hancock County.

This goal is achieved by entertaining and educating the public through various activities such as theatrical performances, book signings, our informative monthly luncheons, hosting special events, and publishing a monthly newsletter at the Kate Lobrano House.

Q-1 Because of our efforts to educate our citizens the Mississippi Historical Society awarded us with the prestigious *Award of Merit* for our production and performance of *The Orphan Train* in 2023.

Q-2 Once again we participated in the Mississippi Gulf Coast Historical and Cultural Exhibition and were recognized as one of the top exhibitors. We also hosted a presentation for the 4th grade MS History class from Holy Trinity School at the Kate Lobrano House.

Q-3 In 2024 the we were fully engaged in the digitalization and uploading of our archives to the Mississippi Digital Library which allows us to preserve and share our archival records with writers, researchers, genealogists and historians.

Q-4 We were highlighted in September by the production and performance of the play *Sink Or Be Sunk* about the Battle of Bay Saint Louis during the War of 1812. This spectacular performance was followed in October by our very popular Cedar Rest Cemetery Tour which features the famous and infamous residents of Cedar Rest. In November the Society had an open house and presentation in conjunction with *Space Day in The Bay*. We also are very pleased to have Patrick Reeder and Tom Stone join our board of directors.

Projects for 2025 include

- expanding our product offering to allow us to retain and attract new members to the Society,
- applying for grants to fund needed electrical and plumbing enhancements to the Kate Lobrano House,
- completing our digital archiving project,
- publishing a book about the history of Hancock County,
- launching our Historical Property Designation Program for recognizing unique and historical properties in Hancock County.

Best Wishes for a Healthy and Fulfilling New Year,

Chris Roth
President

Santo Domingo planter. Guillaume married well into the military class, and thus, he moved up the ruling class on the island. He became in time a very wealthy planter. This couple reared twelve children and raised the cash crops of indigo, cotton, and coffee. This plantation on the south side of the island was not suitable for sugar cane because of the climate and the relatively poor soil.

Although Guillaume came from a bourgeois family back in France, they had resources. They gave him money and slaves. The government gave planters land grants. The Masse Family also provided the couple a dowry of land, slaves, and money. The business model for the French Colonial economy was known as the Plantation System. A cash crop like sugar or cotton was produced by a large population of slaves. A single large extended French Creole family owned and managed the plantation and financed the operation. Free government land and an unlimited source of cash enabled families like the Mestayers to acquire fortunes in one generation.

In the Eighteenth Century, most of the sugar produced in the world came from Santo Domingo and Jamaica. It was shipped to Bordeaux, France. Therefore, Santo Domingo was the most profitable colony in the world. The crop was labor-intensive to raise and France employed a million slaves to cultivate and harvest the sugar cane and grind the stalks into crystalline sugar, molasses, and rum.

When Guillaume died in 1781, his estate boasted of 4,000 acres of land. When his wife, Marie Jeanne Masse died in 1792, this estate included furniture (3,757 livres), animals (2709), 82 slaves (180,620), and land (30,000). This totaled 800,000 livres which might equate to \$400,000 today. One US dollar today might equal 2 livres back then. The plantation contained three main houses for the family,

forty slave shacks, and a dovecote. Incidentally, a dovecote is a building to house pigeons or doves. The birds were especially prized because they would produce fresh meat during the winter months when larger animals were unavailable as a good source.

This rich history is known because it was the custom of the French government and the local Catholic Church to keep records of dowries and estates which allows a modern-day historian and his readers the opportunity to compute the accumulated wealth of these families and the scope of their economy. In the year of 1792 the Mestayer Family was wealthy and the seven surviving heirs of children acquired a good inheritance.

The custom of estate division was a fair system. Each child received an equal share of the land which was divided in seven sections for their Mestayer succession. Slips of paper designating a single, certain property were drawn from a container. Each child drew one slip without knowing which parcel of land he or she would inherit.

In 1792, a slave revolution began at Santo Domingo that dragged on for twelve years. At that time the population of the island included 400,000 white French Creoles, 440,000 slaves,

and 28,000 mulattos or free men/women of color. One such educated free man of color was Toussaint Louverture who stirred up a revolution, first among the population of the free men and women of color and subsequently the entire slave population. The short version of this conflict resulted in 100,000 French and British soldiers dying. One half of those casualties were from malaria. There were 200,000 Haitians dead. Nevertheless, the Republic of Haiti was created in 1804 on the western part of the island.

In the years that followed, approximately 5,000 French Creoles were massacred. Many French Creoles escaped and migrated to the Atlantic seacoast (USA), Cuba, and Louisiana. This migration is called the Dominican Diaspora. All of Guillaume's family was lost in the Haitian Revolution and its aftermath except for two daughters and a grandson, Francois, who was brought to New Orleans in 1804 as a baby.

Guillaume's son Frederic (1762-1809) was his ninth child. All of the Louisiana Mestayers are direct descendants of Frederic. Frederic married well in 1788 when he and Maria Monique Macgille (1766-1817) married. They went through twelve years of revolution. Nevertheless, he moved his family



Richmond Barthé was born in Bay St. Louis, MS. In this photo, he is working on the statue of Toussaint L'Ouverture in 1952.



(You may find more information on Richmond Barthé at the HCHS website—hancockcountyhistoricalsociety.com.)

to New Orleans in 1804. Sometime between 1805 and 1809, Frederic and his four older boys returned to Santo Domingo/Haiti and sadly disappeared.

The third generation of this Mestayer Family lineage is Francois (1804-1872) who was born in Santo Domingo and was brought to New Orleans as a baby. In 1825 he married another French Creole of a local wealthy planter, Euphemic Ida Meyer (1808-1883). Ida's dowry included cash (\$400), two slaves (\$400 and \$600), and land (3,050 acres). Ida's family lived in the New Iberia area of southern Louisiana near Bayou Teche. Francois brings \$400 to the marriage, but more important, he is capable of making a fortune because of the prospect of growing sugar on this land which is fertile and wet, unlike his grandfather's plantation in Santo Domingo. New Iberia was a small ranching community in 1825, and the Mestayer Plantation was nestled in the surrounding countryside.

Francois starts raising sugar cane on Ida's inherited land. During the Eighteenth Century plantations around New Orleans produced only tobacco, cotton, and indigo. In 1796, Etienne de Bore' (1741-1820) and his chemist, Antoine Morin, found a hybrid sugar cane plant by a breeding technique that would ripen in the limited nine month growing season of southern Louisiana. Morin invented a chemical process of granulation of that species of sugar cane plant. This *major* breakthrough established sugar as the big cash crop of southern Louisiana in the first half of the Nineteenth Century.

Francois and Ida bore twelve children. By 1840, Francois was head of a family of fifty-one persons (34 black slaves and 17 white). He acquired property nearby the original plantation at Fausse Point which included swamp land containing abundant cypress trees. Timber became another product of this resourceful planter. By 1860,

Francois was in the top 18% of slaveholders in Louisiana. He had sixty slaves worth \$60,000. The Mestayer Plantation contained a blacksmith, a steam-powered sugar mill, three barns full of corn, hay, and fodder, forty-two American mules, twelve horses, and 2,400 acres.

The French Creole Mestayer Family succeeded in Louisiana as it had back in Santo Domingo. The time-honored playbook of an extended family working together in the same neighborhood generate enormous profits on their sugar plantation. The French Creoles only married neighboring prospective mates of like-kind Catholic Creole families. The marriages were arranged and the dowries negotiated long before the wedding day. As a matter of fact, there were not many choices in rural Santo Domingo or in the Bayou Teche region of Louisiana. Sometimes a mate was sent by a family from France. Love was not the necessary ingredient for a proposed union. The couple married for life, and often bore as many as twelve children.

The War Between the States occurred from April 12, 1861, to May 26, 1865. By the autumn of 1863, the Union Army had control of much of south Louisiana. The Union army policy was simple: take everything you could use, and burn what you could not use to prevent it falling into Confederate hands. Louisiana was a conquered country under military occupation during and after the war. Former slaves became the bosses in some communities under the control or influence of carpetbaggers and Yankee military. One day in that time frame, the Yankees came to the Mestayer Plantation with 250 wagons and cleaned out the family of everything the soldiers could cart off including animals.

After the Union raid, the family moved into the community of New Iberia on a small twenty-five-acre farm. A few of the former



Beth Mestayer is a ninth generation member of the Mestayer family who resides in Hancock County, MS, today.

slaves accompanied them as employees. The family graveyard plot is next to the New Iberia Catholic Church. They continued ranching and farming but on a much smaller scale. Francois died in 1872, and Ida died in 1883. The original plantation land of 2,700 acres went for only \$10,000 at a Sheriff's sale. The swamp land behind the plantation never sold and stayed in the family. It was called "La Terre Ida." The cypress wood was a source of extra income for decades. When oil was discovered on the swamp land in the 1950's, the family quarreled over the inheritance again.

After the War Between the States there was a change in the South from the extended family on the plantation to the individual family in the more modern industrial society. Reconstruction broke down the whole social structure in the South and generated bitterness that divided families during and after the war. Greed, jealousy, sibling rivalry, in the setting of a world-wide depression from 1875-1895 was the experience of most of the Creole families growing sugar and

cotton.

Over the next six generations Mestayers produced numerous lawyers in New Orleans and New Iberia, four mayors in the nearby community of Loreauville, and no jailbirds. One living ninth generation descendent that lives in Bay St. Louis is Beth Ann Mestayer who was born in 1951 in New Orleans at the Baptist Hospital. Her family moved to Waveland in 1953. She graduated from Christ Episcopal School, Bay High School, and Ole Miss University. She earned a Master's Degree at the University of Colorado in Special Education. Beth found work at El Dorado, Arkansas teaching learning disabilities for three years. Later, she moved to Diamondhead in 1988. There she taught at Hancock County High School on Highway 603. Beth bought a house on Main Street in Bay St. Louis around 1998. She has two brothers, Richard F. Mestayer III and James Allen Mestayer.

Beth's mother was Helen Katheryn Hayes (1923-2021) who was a school teacher from Kosciusko, Mississippi. Helen graduated from Millsaps College and Ole Miss University. She was employed in the Reservation Department of Delta Airlines and later taught English at St. Joseph's Academy for Girls. She met Richard Frederick Mestayer at a wedding, and they married in 1947. Helen died in 2021 at age ninety-eight and is buried in the Live Oaks Cemetery in Pass Christian, MS.

Beth's father, Richard Frederick Mestayer II, was from New Orleans and graduated from the University of Iowa. He was in the lumber business in New Orleans. Nonetheless, he liked to fish and hunt and decided to move to Waveland in 1953. He was the father of three children.

Beth's paternal grandfather was Richard Frederick Mestayer, I, (1925-1960), and he also started a lumber business. The family was

Catholic. He married Jeanne Oliver (1925-1950). They had five children. She died young. Beth had an uncle, James De Blanc, who owned and operated a hardware store/lumber business in Waveland on Waveland Avenue at the present day location of the American Legion Club.

In conclusion, the Mestayers have adapted to the fates of boom and bust, always surviving tragedy, yet adapting to new locations, different cash crops, and unpredictable challenges over the last nine generations. This noble extended French Creole clan prospered utilizing the Plantation model growing coffee, cotton, and indigo in Santo Domingo and sugar in New Iberia. The cypress trees on the swamp land of Ida bequeathed an interest in timber that attracted later generations to the lumber business. The last member of this family in our story, Beth Mestayer, is beloved by the Hancock County Historical Society because of the countless hours she spent scanning our archives so they could be embedded in our website forever. In addition, she motivated this author to join the Society and write history over ten years ago.

SOURCES:

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DUELING OAKS

By

James Keating MD

In our history duels were fought between two individuals at a prearranged location and time with matched weapons. In the South, a stand of oaks was often chosen to be the Dueling Ground. A good source of information is "Dueling in Old New Orleans" by Stuart Landry. "Dueling could take several forms. Fencing was a popular early method of battle, and fencing schools sprung up in New Orleans to instruct the city's gentlemen in the art of rapier fighting. Most Creole fencing schools were located in Exchange Alley, in the French



In the South, a stand of oak trees was often chosen to be the Dueling Grounds.

Quarter. The early duels of New Orleans were fought with rapiers and swords...but when the Americans poured into the city in the first half of the Nineteenth Century, they took up dueling enthusiastically, and made it more deadly with the use of knives, pistols, rifles, and shotguns. With the rapier a slight wound was sufficient enough to satisfy honor, but where shotguns were used one of the duelists was nearly always seriously wounded or killed."

After the War Between the States, dueling became less frequent, mostly because of changing public opinion rather than legislation. Nevertheless, Louisiana did outlaw dueling around 1870. For those men who wished to "cultivate the field of honor" in an out-of-the-way place, Hancock County was an excellent choice where the law was not too troublesome. These "dueling refugees" could take the morning train out of New Orleans and return in the afternoon, the bodies of their victims being carried in the baggage car. The principles, their seconds, witnesses, judges, and a surgeon might constitute an entourage who would also take the east-bound train and get off at the Waveland or Bay St. Louis station.

One such duel took place in Bay St. Louis in 1872 between Colonel G. W. Carter, Speaker of the Louisiana House of Representatives, and Captain S. Badger, Chief of the New Orleans Police Department. "The Bay St. Louis Gazette" reported the men went into a field near the Bay St. Louis train station. Both Badger and Carter were notoriously bad shots and could not be expected to hit the side of a barn. As a result, neither dueler's shot hit the other. One reporter marveled that some of the spectators were lucky not to have been struck. Apparently, honor was deemed satisfied by the seconds, and everybody retired to Bordage's Grocery Store to partake a sumptuous lunch of crackers, cheese and whiskey.

In 1873, "The New Orleans Times" reported that Judge William H. Cooley of New Orleans and Colonel R Barnwell Rhett took the east-bound train from New Orleans and got off at the Waveland station. They dueled with shotguns loaded with ball at a distance of forty paces. Cooley fell on the second shot which hit his heart and he died within a few minutes. The newspaper covered the duel on page one in a long, detailed story.

On April 4, 1874, "The New Orleans Times" reported a duel between an attorney, A.B. Phillips, and a broker, Aristide Bienvenu. They met on Nicholson Avenue in Waveland on the beach side of the railroad tracks. Bienvenu fell on the first shot, his brain pierced by a heavy slug. The victor and his party of about twenty persons retired to a house in the neighborhood and waited there until the next west-bound train came. The whole group returned to New Orleans in the Club Car while the corpse rode in the baggage car.

Another duel occurred on April 18, 1874 about seven miles west of Bay St. Louis under a strand of oaks. They and their sec-

onds, witnesses, judges, and surgeons had all arrived a day or two earlier on the New Orleans, Mobile, and Chattanooga Railroad to make the arrangements. Two New Orleans gentlemen shot it out with pistols at twelve paces. This was one of the last documented duels in Mississippi.

In US History, a famous duel took place in 1804 between Alexander Hamilton and Vice President Aaron Burr in Weehawken, New Jersey. Burr killed Hamilton, sadly ending prematurely the life of arguably the second-most important founding father of our country. Washington, of course, is considered the "indispensable man" or most important founding father. In New Orleans City Park, there were two Dueling Oaks where between 1834-1844 many disrespected Creoles fought duels. Many myths of their ghosts are still peddled around this neighborhood. One of the Dueling Oaks was destroyed by a hurricane in the 1940's. The remaining one is thought to be 300 years old with a height of seventy feet and a girth of twenty-five feet.



You Tube

In January 2023, the Hancock County Historical Society created a You Tube channel containing guest speaker presentations from the society monthly luncheons. The web address is www.youtube.com/@hancockcountyhistorical/society. Or you can search YouTube for "Hancock County Historical Society."

MEMBERSHIP DUES

Membership dues in the Hancock County Historical Society are due each January. Membership for an individual is \$30 per year, and for a family they are \$50 per year. Dues may be paid by credit card at our website, or you may send a check to HCHS, P.O. Box 3356, Bay St. Louis MS, 39521





**The Christmas Party and Installation of
2025 Board of Directors**

Ladies—left to right: Georgie Morton, Secretary; Beverly Frater, Treasurer; and Candee Canady, Member at Large.

Gentlemen—left to right: Jim Codling, Historian and Parliamentarian; Ron Thorp, Chairman of the House Committee; Patrick Reeder, Member at Large; Tom Stoner, Member at Large; Bryan Frater, Membership & Fund Raising; Jim Keating, Publicity Chairman; and Chris Roth, President.

Not pictured—Bert Young, Audiovisual Tech and Casey Sullivan, Archivist.



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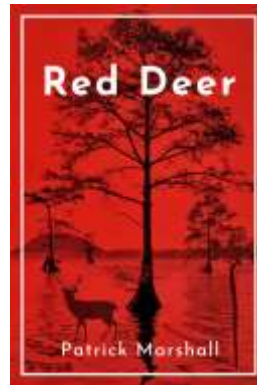
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PHONE () _____ **EMAIL** _____

MEMBERSHIP LEVELS

Founder Individual \$30____ Founder Family \$50____

Thomas Shields \$100 ____

Charles Gray \$250____

Life Time Membership \$500____

DUES RENEW IN JANUARY OF EACH YEAR.